**11 Campaigns and Elections**

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The Republican Party won big in 2010 because of a heavy turnout of conservative Republican voters and strong support from independent voters.

**What We Learned**

***1. How are elections conducted in the United States?*** Americans have the opportunity to cast ballots in several types of elections. In most states, major parties choose their general election candidates in primary elections scheduled a month or more before the November general election. Some states have closed primaries; other states have open primaries.

American voters select public officials in a combination of at-large and district elections. Legislative district boundaries must be redrawn every 10 years after the national census is taken. Legislative districts must also be redrawn because of population movement within a state. According to the one person, one vote rulings of the U.S. Supreme Court, legislative districts must be nearly equal in population. The Voting Rights Act (VRA) makes it illegal for state and local governments to enact and enforce election rules and procedures that diminish the voting power of racial, ethnic, and language minority groups. Nonetheless, redistricting is highly political and can be used to advance the interests of a political party or a particular individual, a process known as gerrymandering.

***2. How are political campaigns organized?***An election campaign is an attempt to get information to voters that will persuade them to elect a candidate. Money is a campaign necessity, but it does not guarantee success. Wealthy candidates can fund their own campaigns, but most raise money from individual contributors and PACs. Political parties and 527 committees may also spend money to support or defeat candidates. Candidates spend the early months of the race raising money, building an organization, seeking group endorsements, planning strategy, and improving the candidate's name recognition, especially if the candidate is not an incumbent. Campaign advertising increases citizen knowledge of issues and candidates, affects voter evaluations of candidates, and increases a candidate’s share of the vote.

***3. What are the similarities and differences in elections for the House and Senate?*** The most striking feature of elections for the U.S. House of Representatives is that most incumbents are reelected. Incumbents are usually better known and better funded than their opponents. Voters typically like their representative even if they disapprove of the performance of Congress as a whole. Many House districts are safe for one or the other political party. Historically, the political party holding the White House loses seats in the House of Representatives in midterm elections. Senate races are more competitive than House elections, and incumbency is not as important. Senate constituencies are usually more diverse, and voters tend to perceive Senate races as national rather than local election contests.

***4. What are the main steps in the contest for the presidential nomination of each party?*** The presidential election process consists of two distinct phases with different rules, requiring candidates to wage two separate campaigns. The first phase is the contest for the nomination. Republicans compete against other Republicans, Democrats against other Democrats in a series of primaries and caucuses designed to select delegates to each party’s national nominating convention. Each candidate’s goal is for his or her supporters to be chosen as convention delegates because the delegates, by majority vote, select the party’s presidential nominee. In 2008, the presidential nomination process had six stages: 1) pre-primary positioning; 2) Iowa and New Hampshire; 3) Super Tuesday; 4) post-Super Tuesday contests; 5) transition; and (6) the national party conventions.

***5. How does the Electoral College affect presidential elections?*** After the party conventions, the presidential election process enters its second and decisive phase—the general election phase, which is a contest between the two major party tickets and, perhaps, a serious independent or third party candidate. Because the Electoral College determines the winner of the general election, the general election phase is actually 51 elections, a contest in every state and the District of Columbia. The winner is the candidate who can win a set of states whose combined electoral votes total at least 270, the majority of electoral votes at stake. With the exception of Maine and Nebraska, the candidate with the most votes in each state receives all of the state’s electoral votes. In the general election phase, each campaign targets battleground states with large numbers of electoral votes at stake. Most elections are decided by the relative size of each party’s base vote and how effective the party is at turning out its base.

The 2000 presidential election made the Electoral College the center of controversy because the winner of the popular vote, Al Gore, lost the election. George W. Bush captured a majority of Electoral College votes because he won a number of states by relatively small margins and because he carried more small states, each of which has three electoral votes regardless of its population. Critics of the Electoral College also worry about electors casting their ballots contrary to the will of the voters in their states and the prospect that Congress will pick a president and vice president if no candidate receives a majority of electoral votes. Reformers offer a number of alternatives to the Electoral College, including direct popular election, but no proposal has come close to winning the level of support needed to propose and ratify a constitutional amendment.

**6. What factors affect voter choice?**

Voter choice is closely related to political party identification. Informed voters base their voting decisions on ideology and the issue positions of the candidates; uninformed voters base their decisions on other factors, such as their judgment about the state of the economy. Perceptions of a candidate's personal qualities and image influence voter choice. Campaigns educate voters about candidates and issues. The three most important underlying factors affecting the outcome of a presidential race are: a) the incumbent president’s approval rating in the months before the election; b) the growth rate of the economy in the quarter prior to the election; and c) the length of time the president’s party has held the White House. Finally, citizens make voting decisions based on their evaluations of the past (retrospective voting) and expectations for the future (prospective voting).

**Tips for Success**

**Make time to study:** Carry your notebook with you and look for opportunities to study, such as a few minutes between classes or time spent waiting in a doctor’s office.

**Positive people rock:** Spend your time with positive people who encourage you to earn your degree while avoiding the losers who try to hold you back.

**Key Terms**

**Air War**

campaign activities that involve the media, including television, radio, and the Internet

**Apportionment**

the allocation of legislative seats among the states

**At-Large Election**

a method for choosing public officials in which the citizens of an entire political subdivision, such as a state, vote to select officeholders

**Balance The Ticket**

an attempt to select a vice-presidential candidate who will appeal to different groups of voters than the presidential nominee

**Base Voters**

rock-solid Republicans or hardcore Democrats, firmly committed to voting for their party’s nominee

**Battleground States**

swing states in which the relative strength of the two major-party presidential candidates is close enough so that either candidate could conceivably carry the state

**Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (BCRA)**

a campaign finance reform law designed to limit the political influence of “big money” campaign contributors

**Blue States**

Democratic states

**Caucus Method of Delegate Selection**

a procedure for choosing national party convention delegates that involves party voters participating in a series of precinct and district or county political meetings

**Closed Primary**

an election system that limits primary election participation to registered party members

**Coattail Effect**

a political phenomenon in which a strong candidate for one office gives a boost to fellow party members on the same ballot seeking other offices

**District Election**

a method for choosing public officials that divides a political subdivision, such as a state, into geographic areas called districts; each district elects one official

**Electoral College**

the system established in the Constitution for indirect election of the president and vice president

**Electors**

individuals selected in each state to officially cast that state’s electoral votes

**527 Committee**

organization created to influence the outcomes of elections by raising and spending money that candidates and political parties cannot raise legally

**Franking Privilege**

free postage provided members of Congress

**General Election**

an election to fill state and national offices held in November of even-numbered years

**Gerrymandering**

the drawing of legislative district lines for political advantage

**Ground War**

campaign activities featuring direct contact between campaign workers and citizens, such as door-to-door canvassing and personal telephone contacts

**Hard Money**

funds that are raised subject to federal campaign contribution and expenditure limitations

**Independent Expenditures**

money spent in support of a candidate but not coordinated with the candidate’s campaign

**Issue Ownership**

the concept that the public considers one political party more competent at addressing a particular issue than the other political party

**Jungle Primary**

a primary election system in which all the candidates for an office run in the same primary regardless of political party affiliation

**Majority-Minority District**

legislative districts whose population is more than 50 percent African American and Latino

**Midcycle Redistricting**

redrawing legislative districts outside the regular redistricting cycle in order to gain political advantage

**One Person, One Vote**

the judicial ruling that the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution requires that legislative districts be apportioned on the basis of population

**Open Primary**

an election system that allows voters to pick the party primary of their choice without regard to their party affiliation

**Political Action Committee (PAC)**

organization created to raise and distribute money in election campaigns

**Pork Barrel Spending**

expenditures to fund local projects that are not critically important from a national perspective

**Presidential Preference Primary**

an election in which party voters cast ballots for the presidential candidate they favor and in so doing help determine the number of national convention delegates that candidate will receive

**Primary Election**

an election held to determine a party’s nominees for the general election ballot

**Proportional Representation (Pr)**

an election system that awards legislative seats to each party approximately equal to its popular voting strength

**Prospective Voting**

the concept that voters evaluate the incumbent officeholder and the incumbent’s party based on their expectations of future developments

**Reapportionment**

the reallocation of legislative seats

**Red States**

Republican states

**Redistricting**

the process through which the boundaries of legislative districts are redrawn to reflect population movement

**Retrospective Voting**

the concept that voters choose candidates based on their perception of an incumbent candidate’s past performance in office or the performance of the incumbent party

**Runoff**

an election between the two candidates receiving the most votes when no candidate got a majority in an initial election

**Soft Money**

the name given to funds that are raised by political parties that are not subject to federal campaign finance regulations

**Split Ticket Ballot**

voters casting their ballots for the candidates of two or more political parties

**Straight Ticket Ballot**

voters selecting the entire slate of candidates of one party only

**Superdelegates**

Democratic Party officials and officeholders selected to attend the national party convention on the basis of the offices they hold

**Swing Voters**

citizens who could vote for either party in an election

**Voting Rights Act (VRA)**

a federal law designed to protect the voting rights of racial and ethnic minorities

**Discussion Questions**

1. What is gerrymandering? How much of an impact can it have on legislative outcomes?

2. Why are most House incumbents who seek reelection successful?

3. On what basis are vice-presidential candidates selected? Who selects them?

4. How does the electoral college work? What are the chief criticisms of the electoral college? What is the main defense of the electoral college?

5. What role do debates play in the presidential election process?

**Interactive Activity**

**Visual Literacy: The Electoral College: Campaign Consequences and Mapping the Results**

Every four years the nation holds elections in all 50 states to elect the President of the United States. The outcome of the race is not determined, however, by the popular vote—the number of votes a candidate receives. Rather, it is the Electoral College votes that determine the actual winner of the election. Members of the Electoral College (Electors) are selected at the state level using a number of different methods. What are these methods? What effect do these methods have on elections and campaigns? Do they make for a better democratic system? In this activity, you will explore these and other issues related to the role of the Electoral College in selecting the President of the United States.

[View Visual Literacy Activity](http://www.ablongman.com/cmsredirects/long_mypoliscilab_2009/vl.electoralcollege.html)

**“Talking About American Government” Podcasts**

Author Neal Tannahill discusses the most important concepts in this chapter

* [Party Control in Congress](http://abavtooldev.pearsoncmg.com/VPStreaming/audio.php?clipID=ab_amgov_think_tennahill/ch09_controlling_congress.mp3)
* [Bicameralism](http://abavtooldev.pearsoncmg.com/VPStreaming/audio.php?clipID=ab_amgov_think_tennahill/ch09_bicameral_congress.mp3)
* [Congressional Elections](https://deimos.apple.com/WebObjects/Core.woa/BrowsePrivately/hccs.edu.1989558874.01989558881.2182320424?i=1717703403)
* [Presidential Nomination Process](https://deimos.apple.com/WebObjects/Core.woa/BrowsePrivately/hccs.edu.1989558874.01989558881.2173936516?i=1409451523)